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FM AMEMBASSY VILNIUS  
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UNCLAS VILNIUS 000092

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SUBJECT: Media Coverage of Lithuania Accepting Guantanamo Detainees

¶1. All major Lithuanian media outlets carried accounts of the GOL's interest in accepting some detainees from Guantanamo, with some stories saying that talks with U.S. representatives have already started.

¶2. On February 11-12, both major newswires, ELTA and BNS, (mostly factual, but used by different papers with varying political perspectives) summarized the story. BNS carried Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius's comments made in an interview on the station 'Ziniu Radijas' (news radio) on February 12: After noting that Lithuania's partnership with its allies made Lithuanian security stronger and for this partnership, the country needs to make unpopular decisions, PM Kubilius said, "Lithuanian security is strengthened by partnership with its allies, in this case the United States...we are ready to negotiate openly and consistently for this."

¶3. Kubilius was also quoted on Lithuanian National Television and Radio (respected, serious, balanced news coverage) after meeting with the State Defense Council saying that consultations in relation to the U.S. request will start, "There is a request from our allies. Other EU states have received the same request. These requests are considered on the EU level. We see a certain partnership responsibility."

¶4. All these outlets covered Foreign Minister Usackas. ELTA: "The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry intends to start consultations with representatives of the USA on the possibility of accepting several people detained in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas said on Wednesday." BNS: "Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas told the press, 'the Foreign Ministry was instructed to start consultations with representatives of the U.S. administration over technical, legal and security aspects concerning the possibility of taking in a few of the Guantanamo detainees in Lithuanian territory.' Lithuania could host no more than 10 detainees, who 'wouldn't pose a threat to Lithuanian security and public order,' said Usackas...the Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus summoned the State Defense Council on Wednesday to the President's office."

¶5. The daily newspaper "Lietuvos rytas" (very popular, left-wing [anti-Kubilius], lacking depth in news analysis) on February 12 carried the BNS newswire account and quotes from PM Kubilius. When asked why the detainees could not return to their home countries, Kubilius replied, "Ask them when they come."

¶6. The daily "Respublika" (anti-American, anti-Semetic, ultra-nationalistic, fourth most popular daily newspaper) published a sensationalistic account on February 12 entitled, "Usackas Will Greet Guantanamo Prisoners with Bread and Salt," referring to the traditional way of greeting guests to a home. The article uses an academic and a lawyer to question the legality of the government's willingness to accept Gitmo detainees.

¶7. The internet news portal, DELFI (somewhat balanced, with a young (up to 24 yrs.) audience), carried the story on February 11 and 12, with today's account, "Lithuanians Don't Want Prisoners from Guantanamo," more critical of accepting detainees, while the previous day's story showed both sides of the question.

¶8. The dailies, "Vilniaus diena" and "Kauno diena" (both owned by the same news group, formerly influential, neutral coverage) on February 12 published the same article, which contained factual information from the BNS and ELTA wire services, with the following additions: Usackas did not give a timetable for negotiations,

meaning detainees could arrive by the end of 2009. Kubilius confirmed that Lithuania, along with other EU members, received a formal request from the U.S.

19. Conclusion: Accepting Gitmo detainees in Lithuania is a story that is being carried by all major media outlets here, with interpretations depending on the outlet. Given current media climate, it would be in our interest to have a statement indicating current official USG position.

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